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South Wales Winter Climbs

Pen Y Fan

Graham 'Sven' Hassall MCI, ML(W)

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Guiding & Instruction

A free mini guide

PEN Y FAN

This mini guide is the first to cover the area since the excellent Winter Climbing in South Wales was published in the 1980s. Since then the area has enjoyed some excellent winters with climbers establishing numerous new routes and variations. This publication is an attempt consolidate and publish these routes; please be aware that many of the routes cannot be verified or have not had a documented repeat ascent, and that the changeable nature of winter climbing and the proximity of climbs suggests that at least some of them may be duplicates. Where this is the case, a route is marked with a red dagger symbol (†). Please therefore use this guide cautiously, and where possible, send new routes, amendments and suggestions to info@summitmountaineering.com

LOCATION GR SO 013216

Situated in the Brecon Beacons National Park, Pen y Fan (pronounced “*Pen a Van*”, meaning the Top Peak) sits at 886m above sea level and is the highest peak in South Wales. The twin summits of Pen y Fan and Corn Du at 873m were formerly referred to as Cadair Arthur or 'Arthur's Seat' and are a common objective for arduous military training exercises; it is not unknown to top-out in winter gear, crampons and axes, to have half a dozen soldiers run past in lightweight clothing and carrying huge packs.

The mountain's height and aspect mean that it offers some of the highest and longest routes in South Wales, which also tend to come into condition early and reliably.

The climbs tend to be of mixed nature with an air of seriousness, often on frozen turf; although there are plenty of wire placements, pegs, Warthogs and similar turf protection, are a recommended addition to a standard rack.



Paul Tucker on the first pitch of Central Gully (III), © David Kilner

Turf Wars, 30m, V 4 † From the belay of Central Gully Direct climb up diagonally leftwards past the distinctive right angled overhang to enter the next groove left. Climb this steeply and boldly to better protection and a resting ledge. Climb the next wall via one awkward step to an alcove and the top. P. Blackburn, P. Tucker, 21/2/2012.

Grooved Buttress Direct (V) The next obvious groove. First recorded ascent in 2010 by P. Blackburn but with two in-situ pegs.



Andrew Foster on Skype. Credit L. Foster

Pete's Left-Facing Corner, 30m, V 5 † Climb steeply up and right (peg) to gain the well-defined rock groove. Climb this directly up steep rock and before passing a bulge on its left, and then trending right to an easier finish. P. Blackburn, J. King, 28/3/13.

Skype, 30m, V 6 † The route starts by following the second obvious book corner starting from the right hand side of the headwall. Climb with difficulty up the initial corner with good gear on the right wall and good axe placement in the frozen turf in the back of the corner. Make a difficult move to a bridge position underneath a small overhang in an area of loose rock. Arrange gear and bear slightly left to then climb the overhang directly. Follow easy ground to the summit. A. Foster, M. Napier, 06/02/12.

Further rightwards, the final groove is taken by a 15m square corner, taken by No Fun for the Young.

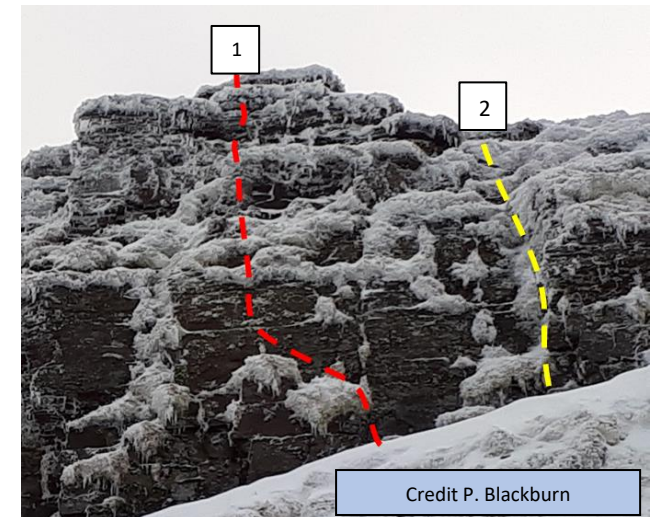
Hedfan, 25m, V † 15m to the left of No Fun's corner is a block with a vertical twin-cracked wall above. Climb awkwardly onto the block, on its right side, before directly tackling the wall above, and a pull (or grovel!) over the final overhang to finish. P. Tucker 01/03/15.

No Fun for the Young, 15m, III 4

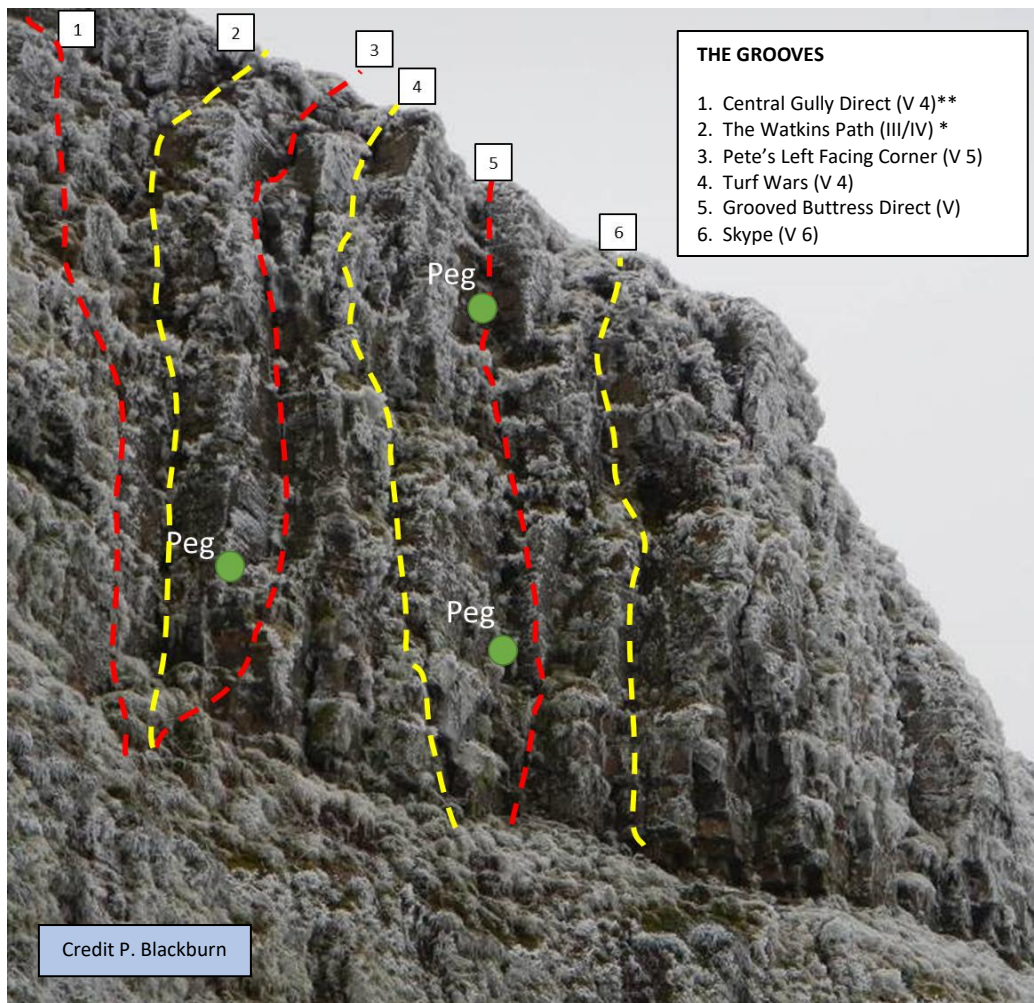
The final corner on the right of the Grooves sector, starting on a ledge just to the left. From the ledge, make an awkward move up and right into the groove. Climb the groove using small footholds on both walls and good axes in the crack. Large gear protects the final blind move. R. Davidson, W. Attridge & H. Kingston, 04/02/12

The Grooves – Far Right.

1. Hedfan (V)
2. No Fun for the Young (III 4)



Credit P. Blackburn



THE GROOVES

1. Central Gully Direct (V 4)**
2. The Watkins Path (III/IV) *
3. Pete's Left Facing Corner (V 5)
4. Turf Wars (V 4)
5. Grooved Buttress Direct (V)
6. Skype (V 6)

ACCESS AND CONSERVATION

The land is owned by the National Trust and sits at the heart of the Brecon Beacons National Park; access is facilitated by the Countryside Rights of Way (CROW) Act, with the National Trust permitting climbing when 'in-condition'. When in doubt please check the Access and Rights of Way updates at www.beacons-npa.gov.uk and the BMC Regional Access Database. Please always take care to avoid erosion and damage to underlying vegetation.

PARKING, APPROACH AND DESCENT

The cliff can be reached in an hour from either the A470 Storey Arms car park (GR SN 983203) or from the Pont ar Daf car park to its south (GR SN 987199), both following the obvious paths from the car park to the summit.

From the summit of Pen Y Fan, descend the north ridge marked Cefn Cwm Lluch for 200m until it is possible to traverse easily eastwards onto the north-east face. The climbs on the headwall can be reached by the majority of buttress and gully climbs, or with commitment, from the summit itself, by traversing in from either left or right.

DESCENT

The absence of reliable belays means that descent is by the north ridge or traversing back in from the saddle to the south east.

PARTICIPATION STATEMENT

Climbing and mountaineering are activities with a danger of personal injury or death. Participants in these activities should be aware of and accept these risks and be responsible for their own actions. The inclusion of any route in this publication does not guarantee its accuracy, or access. Whilst all details have been checked as thoroughly as possible at the time of writing, it is your responsibility to ensure both your legal access and safety.

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This work is a not-for-profit project that would not have been possible without the kind support of those who submitted new route information and photos, most notably Peter Blackburn, without whose input, this guide would have been grossly incomplete. The author would like to offer particular thanks to Gary Lewis and Haydn Griffith who pioneered the first guidebook to the area (and many of the routes!) and have permitted the reproduction of their work.

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Hang 'Em High, 30m, V 4 * Start 10m left of Central Gully Direct. Climb up to the left of a steep cracked nose at 10m. Move up to gain a niche with a groove on the left and a wide crack on the right. Climb the groove moving left at the top to finish directly up the wall above. G. Lewis, M. Learoyd, 25/02/86.

Central Gully Direct, 30m, V 4 ** This fine climb follows the first, obvious and broad left-facing corner on the right-hand side of the wall providing an excellent finish to central gully. C. Heard, G. Lewis, C. Pound, Feb 1980.

The Watkins Path, 40m, Grade III/IV * Start as for Central Gully Direct and climb a diagonal crack-line rightwards up the wall to the right. A. Watkins, R. Thomas, 25/02/84.

Credit P. Blackburn

The north-east face is split laterally by sloping shelves of vegetation separated by short rock walls, and a steep enclosed headwall. The gullies below the headwall are easy to begin with, but gradually increase in difficulty.

Sidewinder, 80m, IV † This takes the winding easy snowy gully on the left side of the left mountain face, into the rocky alcove above. The main pitch (40 metres) starts towards the centre of the basin. Head easily upwards over snow and rock to the base of a distinctive corner. Ascend the steep right wall to pull powerfully onto a grassy ledge. Now traverse 5 metres precariously leftwards below a large overhanging block. Take a more direct line now over stepped ground to easy ground. P. Blackburn, P. Tucker, 02/01/17.

Open Gully, 90m, I † P. Tucker, 2015.

Staircase Gully, 100m, II/III † A good introduction to mixed climbing. P. Tucker, 2015.

Staircase Gully Right-Hand, 120m, II † P. Tucker, 2015.

B-Line Gully, 120m, I † P. Tucker, 2015.

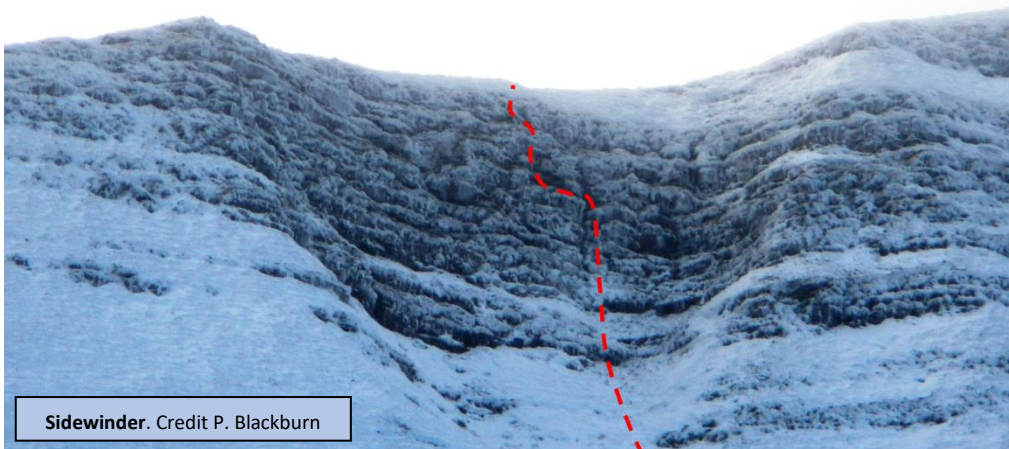
Apex Gully, 150m, I † P. Tucker, 2015.

Far-Left Gully, 100m, I Generally easy angled, all difficulties can be easily avoided. Start about 200m left of the obvious central gully. FA unknown.

Far-Left Gully Rib-Exit, 110m, II † The short buttresses give good sport. P. Tucker, 2015.

Y Gully, 80m, II † Climb halfway up Far-Left Gully then head rightwards up the steepening gully line. A step short wall gives access to ledges. Carry on up easier ground until a final short buttress. This is climbed, with interest, by a line to the left. P. Blackburn, C. Ince, 14/02/16.

Triple Buttress, 80m, III 4 † This route climbs the 3 distinct buttresses a short way up Far-Left Gully. Climbed in four short pitches, each progressively harder. Start in the centre of the first buttress. P. Blackburn, P. Tucker, 18/02/16.



Sidewinder. Credit P. Blackburn

Marshmallow Traverse, 80m, Grade III/IV † This route makes a rising rightwards traverse across the headwall. Start at a one metre rock step 25m below the summit on the south east ridge. G. Lewis, M. Learoyd, 25/01/84.

20m. Traverse easily right for 16m towards a pointed nose of rock. Bridge across a small gap to gain a belay in a square cut corner.

30m. Swing down to a lower traverse line and continue until 3m past Pat's Right Facing Corner (5m below the actual corner). Move up to the next traverse line and continue delicately across the wall for 8m before climbing up to reach a belay on the rock spike of The Steeple.

30m. Climb down 3m and follow a rising traverse line to finish near Central Gully Direct.



Sarah Hassall – Far Right Gully

boulders

BECAUSE IT'S RAINING AGAIN

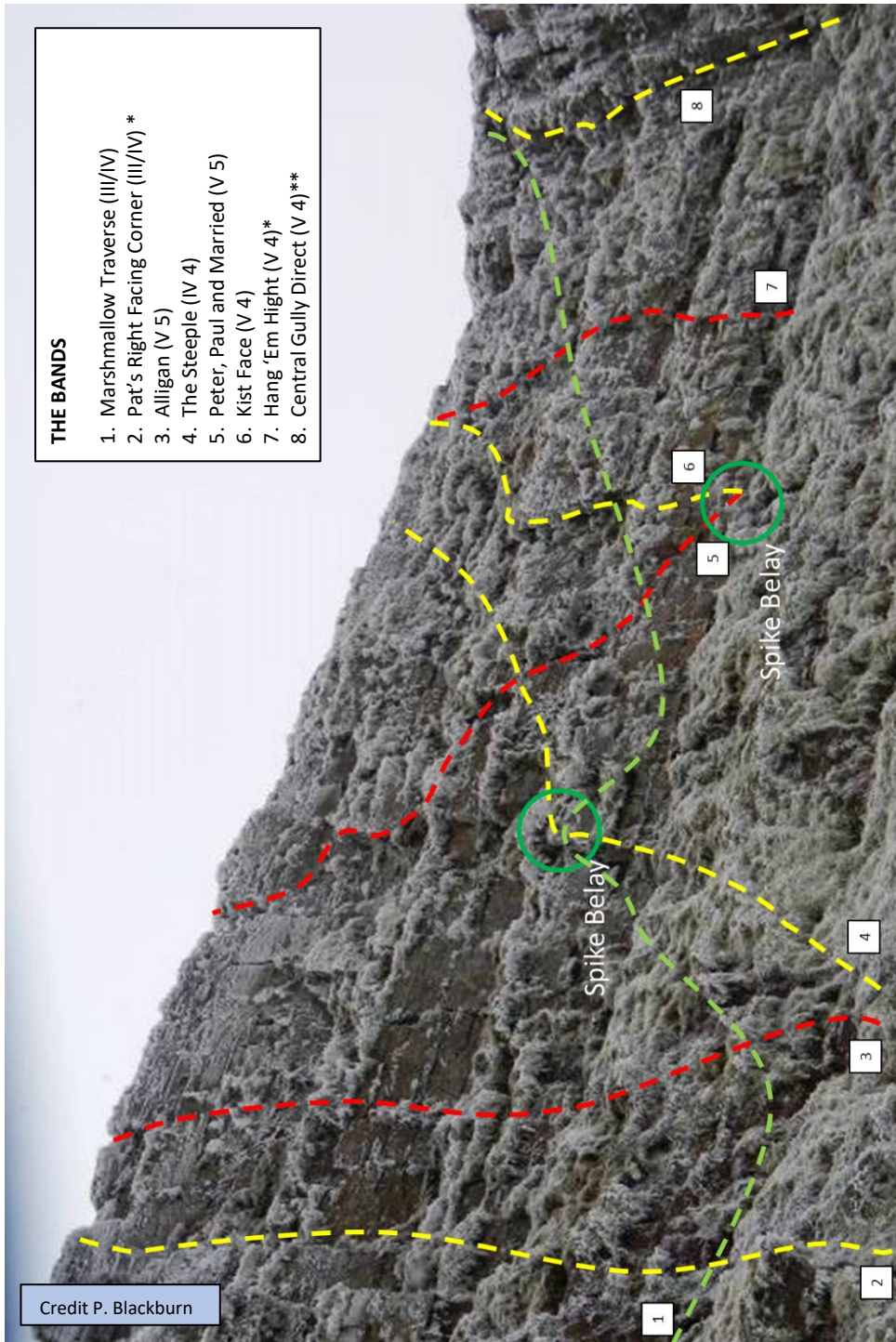
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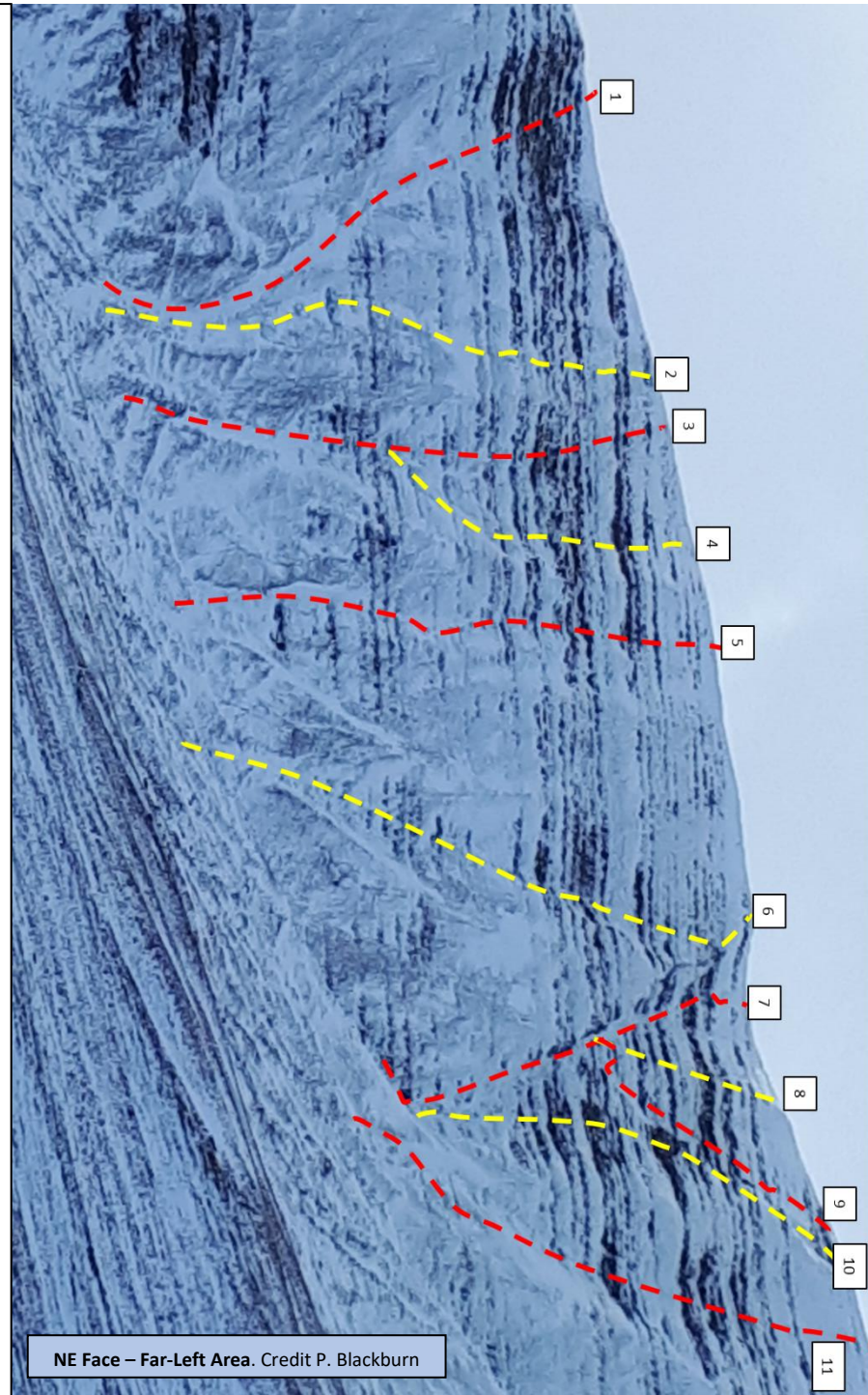
THE BANDS

1. Marshmallow Traverse (III/IV)
2. Pat's Right Facing Corner (III/IV) *
3. Alligan (V 5)
4. The Steeple (IV 4)
5. Peter, Paul and Married (V 5)
6. Kist Face (V 4)
7. Hang 'Em High (V 4) *
8. Central Gully Direct (V 4)**



Credit P. Blackburn

- NORTH-EAST FACE - FAR LEFT AREA**
1. Sidewinder (IV)
 2. Open Gully (I)
 3. Staircase Gully (II/III)
 4. Staircase Gully Right-Hand (II)
 5. B-Line Gully (I)
 6. Apex Gully (I)
 7. Far-Left Gully (I)
 8. Far-Left Gully Rib-Exit (II)
 9. Y Gully (II)
 10. Triple Buttress (III 4)
 11. Near-Left Gully (I)



NE Face - Far-Left Area. Credit P. Blackburn

- (1) Climb the short, broken buttress and belay at the foot of the next.
- (2) Climb the centre of the next buttress on blocky steep ground to exit onto slopes. Scramble up to the centre of the largest of the 3 buttresses.
- (3) Climb the very steep crack to the right of the centre of the buttress; difficult but well protected. Continue up the line of the buttress until a belay at a small outcrop.
- (4) Scramble up easy terrain until a final short buttress. This is climbed via the crack on the right to emerge on the ridge.

Near-Left Gully, 150m, I A little longer and steeper. Start 100m left of Central Gully. FA unknown.

Hidden Gully, 100m, I † Easy route to the top, from the base of Central Gully. P. Blackburn 2015.

Pedestal Rib, 100m, I † The friendly rib just to the left of Central Gully. A small diversion right (2/3 up) leads to 'The Pedestal', a distinctive perch from where to view the Headwall. P. Blackburn, 2015.

Central Gully Direct, 200m, III ** This takes the large gully in the centre of the face. Follow the wide gully, easily at first until a short ice step provides the first technical challenge. Above this are two further rock steps, both mixed and separated by sections of snow, followed by the turf headwall taking the line of least resistance either left or right. FA Unknown.

Central Rib, 200m, II Start in Central Gully; follow this to the first step, move right onto the rib and follow this to the top. FA unknown.

Near-Right Gully, 200m, II Start 200m right of Central Gully at a well-defined gully. Climb this to where it forks, taking the left-hand branch. Finish up the shorter north-face headwall. FA unknown.

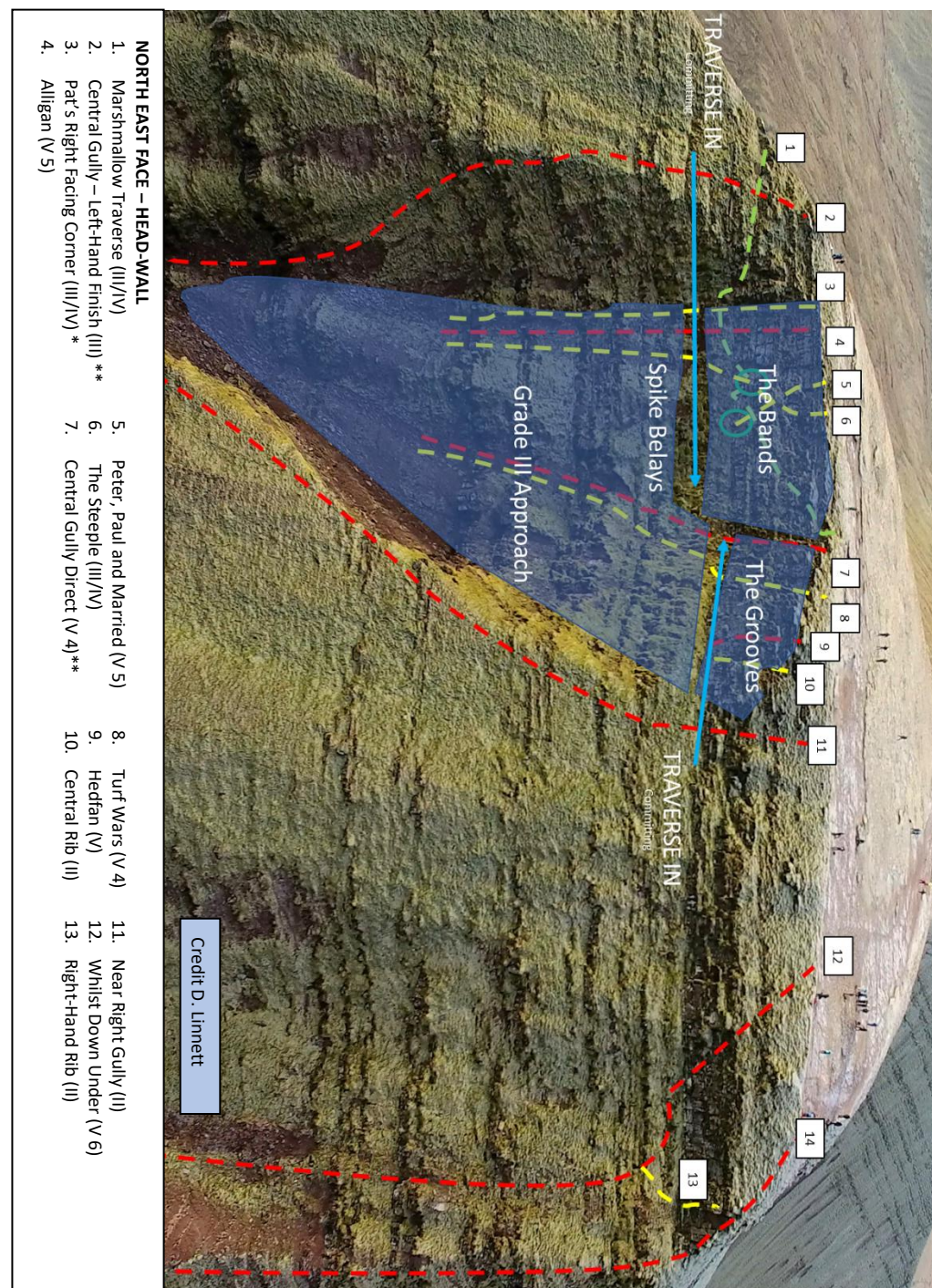


The author on Central Rib

Whilst Down Under, 10m, V 6 Climb Near Right Gully (II) up to the head wall; instead of traversing to the left to climb up the frozen turf, position yourself under the furthest most rock buttress on the head wall. There is a big shield of rock which can be threaded as a belay. Climb with difficulty up the off-width crack to a small overhang. Get good axe placements and swing round on to the blank shield. Place a crucial No 1 wire, then go for the top via some exciting mixed and turf placements. A. Foster, M. Napier, 20/12/11.

Right-Hand Rib, 200m, Grade II The rib between Near-Right Gully and Far-Right Gully. G. Hassall, B. Whale, 08/01/10.

Far-Right Gully, 200m, Grade I As for Near-Right Gully, but taking the right fork to the ridge. Left-hand finishes have also been claimed at a similar grade by taking a second fork to the left, after 80m of climbing. FA unknown.



The centre and left of the headwall consist of three distinctive rock steps (The Bands); whilst the upper-right section is home to a several distinctive rocky grooves/corners (The Grooves). Below the headwall proper, is a steep 20 to 30 metre vegetated approach climbed at grade III, with limited protection. There are numerous good belays below the Grooves and a large spike and rock anchor at a central point, at the base of the Bands. This is reached by the shallow rib which runs up within Central Gully and is a good starting point for several routes. Elsewhere, anchors are very poor. Traverses from the left and right are possible with commitment.

Pat's Right-Facing Corner, 30m, III/IV * Start below an obvious right facing groove high on the left-hand end of the headwall. Climb directly up steep rock and vegetation to a difficult finish up the corner. P. Littlejohn, C. King, 1979.

Alligan, 30m, V 5 Start at a series of cracks 3m right of the previous route at a good belay and climb gymnastically up the cracks and tufts to the top. Protection improves with height. C. Parkin, G. Lewis, 25/01/86.

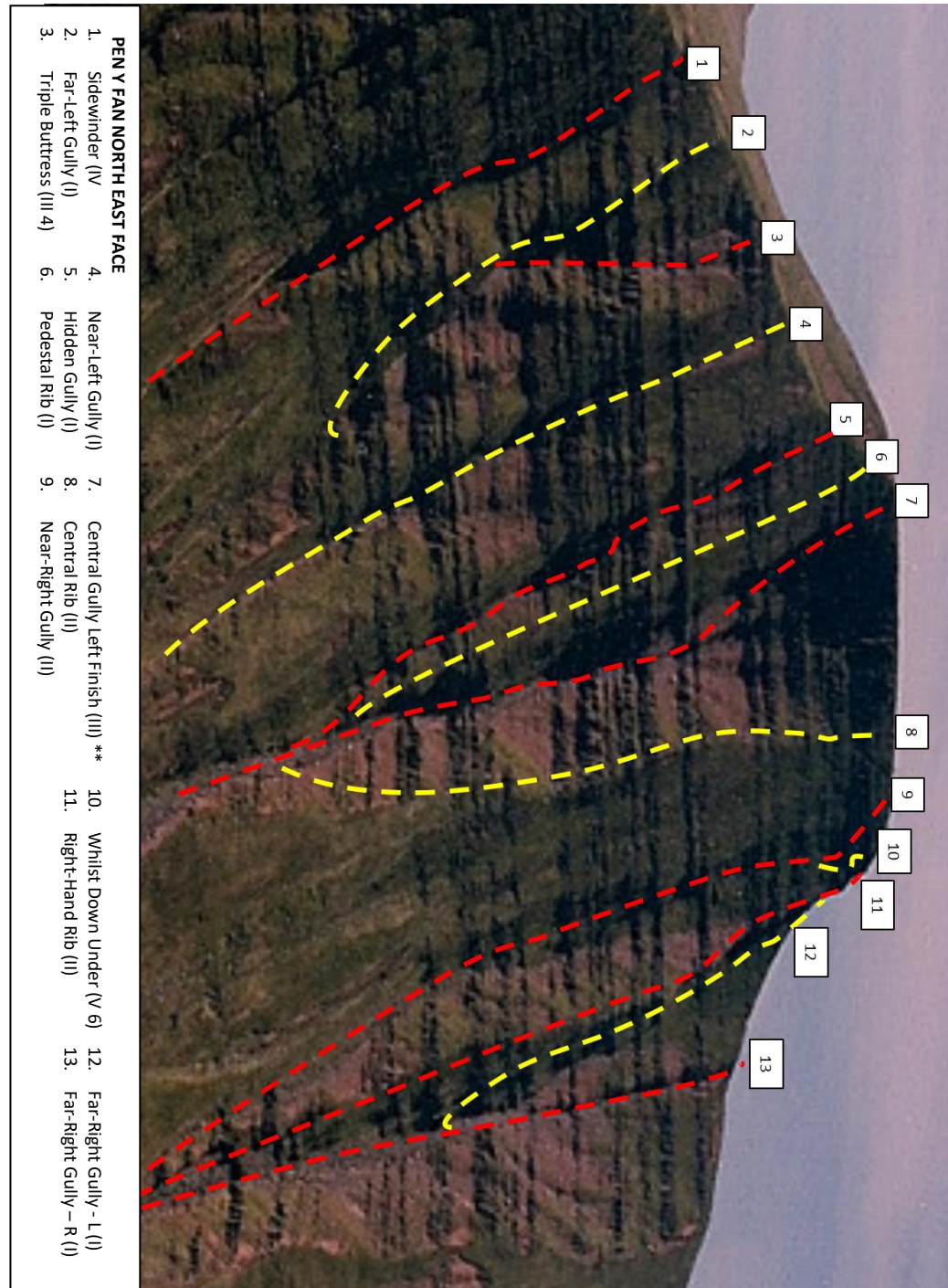
Peter, Paul and Married, V 5 † Start at the large rock spike. Head up and left to a crack. Head up and left across a slab and up steeply to a ledge. Step left then follow the diagonal left to right ramp to a ledge at the top. Step left and finish steeply up the groove. P. Blackburn, P. Tucker, 11/2/2012

Kist Face, 25m, IV 4 † Belay at the central rock spike below the Bands. Above is a square cut 8m wide niche (The Kist). Climb 5m up the steep wall and pull into the Kist; climb out of the right side, with good gear. Trend diagonally right over broken ground to the top. P. Tucker, P. Blackburn, 21/02/12.

The Steeple, 35m, IV † Start as for Alligan but climb up and right until below a huge rock spike; gain this and trend right to the top. G. Lewis, C. Seaton, M. Griffiths, 20/01/80.



Right-Hand Rib. Credit M. Trevers.



As well as the 'standard' route, the right-hand side of Central Gully is also home to the triangular 'Toblerone Buttress', which contains the following four variations/short routes.

Toblerone, 80m, IV † A fairly direct route up the triangular cliff, finishing at the apex of the triangle, and an intersection with Central Rib. P. Blackburn, J. King, 28/03/13.

20m - Climb the ice pillar in the bottom centre of the buttress to a wide ledge below a steep wall. Traverse left to belay on top of a small shale mound, below a short corner.

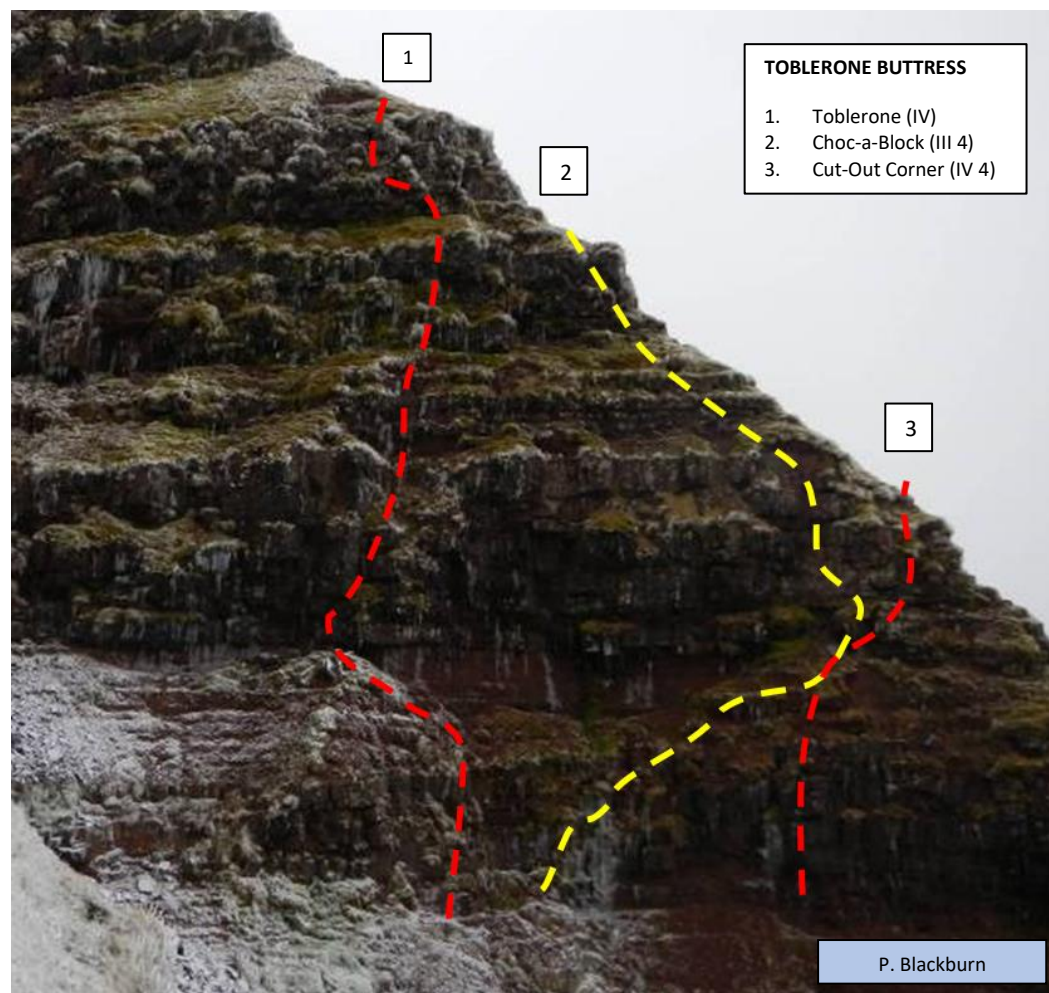
60m Climb steeply up the short corner and then slightly right and easier ground below a steeper wall. Climb this via the central crack to arrive below the final step, where an awkward step up and right leads to a finish up the short steep groove.

Choc-a-block, 65m, III 4 † Another worthwhile route albeit escapable throughout. P. Tucker and M. Marder, 28/03/13.

20m - Climb the ice pillar in the bottom centre of the buttress., then diagonally until under its main overhang; walk right to a good belay below a corner.

15m - Move left to a capped small corner and climb leftwards around the significant block. Climb the block's front face on edges in a fine position. Pull onto the block and then continue easily up the groove to belay above a short snow slope.

30m - Climb the next two steps through the obvious weaknesses and scramble to the top of the Buttress, where it meets Central Rib.



Cut-out Corner, 35m, IV 4 † Start right of centre of the triangular 'Toblerone Buttress' at the left edge of a steep wall in Central Gully. Climb the thinner right-hand ice fall in a corner/chimney using jutting ledges and ascend the snow slope above to arrive at the base of a right slanting corner, leading to Central Rib (belay possible). Climb the corner to pull steeply onto the Central Rib left edge and belay above. P Tucker, B. Tucker, 01/02/15.

Chasing conditions. Credit D. Kilner

